

FROM RED

'CONTACT'

Gift Was Really A Trap

THIS IS the second installment in the amazing, exclusive account of the author's experiences at the hands of Communist agents. Miss Hammerstein was released on March 26, 1964, after serving 27 months in Russian and East German jails.

By GABRIELE HAMMERSTEIN

(As Told To Peter Hahn)
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NEW YORK — December, 1960, was the gloomiest month of the year in West Berlin.

I had arrived there four months earlier, to start rehearsing for an engagement at the State Opera House in the Soviet sector. It was the first big break in my singing career as a Wagnerian soprano and now — only a short time later — I found myself involved in a dangerous cloak-and-dagger.

U.S. intelligence had asked me to report on Russian diplomats and officers whom I met while performing in East Berlin. Then, the Russian KGB — state security service — also asked me to work for them. And when I reported to our side, I had been "dumped."

"We can't protect you. Either get out of Berlin, or you're on your own," I was told. I didn't want to leave Berlin and my big chance for a singing career, so I decided to string the Reds along.

The Soviet officer who was pressing me to spy for the KGB was Evgeni Khedrov. As a "political officer with influence in cultural matters," he had got me singing contracts in Leipzig and Dresden.

He was counting on my gratitude as a "progressive, peace-loving American citizen" to give him details on the personal habits and government jobs of my friends with the United States.

My contact with U.S. intelligence was Robert Bennett. He had sought me out when I told U.S. authorities that I had been asked to sing at the Russian embassy in East Berlin.

When I told Bennett of Khedrov's request, he refused to give me false information I could feed the Russians. But I knew that one word from Khedrov could nullify my chance to sing at the Staatsoper. So I simply invented a list of names, descriptions, and nonexistent jobs.

My meetings with Khedrov — I later learned that his name is Colonel Evgeni Alexeyevich Zaoztrovsev of the KGB, once ousted from the U.S. for espionage — always took place in East Berlin, and was arranged by a complicated code.

Evgeni, as he insisted I call him, had never attempted to pay me for any of the tidbits of information — all of them pure fiction. But just a few days before Christmas, as we parted company after one of our talks, he said:

"I'd like to give you a Christmas present, Gabi," and he handed me an envelope. "Buy yourself some perfume," he added. On the way home I opened the envelope. It contained 800 East German Marks (nearly \$200.)

I was so perplexed by this "gift" that I called Bennett and asked him what to make of Khedrov's money. He explained that this was a "token," in spy language, a sum of money which the Russians could hold over my head for intimidation purposes.

I decided that things had gone far enough, and sent the money back to Khedrov with a note, saying: "This is too much for a Christmas present, and I have no price for treason." I hoped this would stop him from pestering me further.

The next day I got an unexpected phone call from Bennett, who "had to see me urgently." When I arrived at the private West Berlin address he gave me, I was taken to a room which was bare except for a table and chair. "I want you to sit down," Bennett said, "and write me a complete report of your dealings with the Russians, repeat the information you told us about them previously, and explain why you persisted in disregarding official advice to end your involvement with the KGB."

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